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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000119

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TAGS: PREL MOPS MASS MARR AE
SUBJECT: NATO SECGEN WELL RECEIVED IN ABU DHABI

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a brief visit to Abu Dhabi January 24, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer gave a lecture on the goals of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), met senior UAEG officials to discuss potential areas of cooperation, and gave an upbeat briefing to NATO Ambassadors prior to his departure. This first official visit of a NATO SecGen was well received in the UAE. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a January 24 lecture at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, the NATO SecGen gave an enthusiastic overview of ICI goals and his sense of UAEG interest in closer cooperation with NATO. He characterized four GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE) as currently engaged in ICI, which was initiated in 2004, with two (Saudi Arabia and Oman) hopefully showing interest in the future. (He was most optimistic about Saudi Arabia signing up.) The audience of about 200, including a large uniformed contingent from the UAE military, seemed receptive to the SecGen's message that the globalization of threats (he cited nuclear threats and Iran) required new and novel approaches to security cooperation.

¶3. (SBU) Stating that the NATO Defense College in Rome had a dedicated faculty to assist ICI participants, the SecGen cited training of Afghan and Iraqi security forces, disaster relief, peacekeeping, and military education in general as sources of expertise that NATO could share with GCC states, which send a "growing number of participants to conferences and seminars." He hoped ICI partners would appoint liaison officers (not necessarily resident at NATO) to solidify coordination -- and said the conclusion of Information Sharing Agreements was urgently needed to regularize data sharing. The benefits of closer cooperation are mutual, he concluded, citing his desire for a tailored package of engagement activities with each ICI country.

¶4. (SBU) Subsequent to his lecture, the SecGen had high-profile meetings with UAE Minister of Defense (also Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai) Mohammed bin Rashid, and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ). Both meetings got prominent play in local media, with the semi-official Arabic daily al-Ittihad putting a very positive spin on the visit (albeit with few substantive details as to potential areas of cooperation).

¶5. (C) The SecGen made a reference in his lecture to the UAE military presence in Afghanistan, and in a private session with NATO Ambassadors he noted that they were "teamed up with Canada in Kandahar," but did not specify the nature of their combat mission or the size of their deployment. Press

coverage limited those references to "humanitarian" operations. De Hoop Scheffer told NATO Ambassadors that MbZ had "not ruled out doing more" in Afghanistan, in addition to lamenting that there were not more Muslim participants in ISAF combating al-Qaeda, which had "hi-jacked" Islam. He said MbZ feels "a bit lonely" as a moderate Arab actively engaged in Afghanistan -- and thus somewhat "shy" to promote the UAE role there. MbZ had not committed to visit NATO headquarters, although the SecGen had told him that his voice should be heard within the alliance and that the UAE should be "recognized more formally as an ISAF participant." MbZ had also been "extremely worried" about Iran, which had "dominated" the conversation.

¶6. (C) De Hoop Schaffer also noted to gathered Ambassadors just prior to his departure (in an airport VIP lounge) that his Emirati interlocutors had shown "keen interest in strengthening cooperation with NATO" in a 26 1 format (and through a formalized Individual Cooperation Program, or ICP).

NATO is increasingly an "accepted phenomenon" in GCC discourse, he stated, and he left with the "strong impression that I was very welcome." That said, he called for increased efforts to expand awareness of NATO in the Arab world. Asked by ADCM to highlight NATO's particular "value added" in a very busy engagement calendar with the UAE (many NATO countries, including the U.S., having extensive and well developed engagement programs that often tax the limited personnel resources of this Gulf nation), de Hoop Schaffer cited the following as key priorities: interoperability, peacekeeping, counter-insurgency (as practiced in Afghanistan), the civil-military interface, and consequence management / disaster response.

¶7. (C) Comment: The SecGen's first ever official visit to the UAE was timely and well received. Measures of how

ABU DHABI 00000119 002 OF 002

effectively ICI engagement develops into a more concrete relationship will include just how specifically a menu of engagement activities can be tailored to address gaps not already covered by bilateral programs, how quickly the UAE concludes an Information Sharing Agreement, public acknowledgment by the UAE of its ISAF role in Afghanistan, and UAE enthusiasm for setting up formal liaison channels. End comment.

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